

## INTRODUCTION

Anytime you start to think I’m even close to being perfect—just talk to Cindy. She can tell you, for instance, that I’m not much fun to play board games with. She says I cheat but I just claim I use the rules for my maximum advantage. I’m just too competitive is one problem—I want to win. Several years ago, someone gave us a game called “Bible Trivia.” I couldn’t wait. I just *knew* I was going to clobber Cindy, Jenni, and Laura Grace; after all, I was the expert! I even let them go first. One of the first Bible Trivia questions was, “Name the only miracle of Jesus that appears in all four gospels.” I forget whose turn it was, but I was sitting there thinking, “Ooh, ooh, I know the answer to that one!” I was hoping they would all miss so I could answer it correctly. But I think Cindy got it right: The only miracle of Jesus mentioned in all four gospels is the feeding of the five thousand. (More about that in the rest of the message; meanwhile, back to the game.) I was ready for my first question! My card read: NAME THE THIRD POPE. I couldn’t believe it! I said, “That’s not in the Bible! That’s church history! The word “Pope” doesn’t even appear in the Bible! Somebody must have given us the Catholic version or something. I refuse to answer that question because this is supposed to be Bible Trivia, not Church History Trivia!” (Of course, I didn’t have a clue whom the third Pope was.) I was outvoted three to one that I had to try to answer the question, anyway. My solution? I just quit. “I’m not playing Bible trivia if the questions don’t deal with the Bible.” So the three of them kept on playing while I steamed over the terrible tragedy of having a question like that in a game called “Bible Trivia.” Another fun family night at the Dykes’ house! As you can imagine, my girls have kidded me about how well I played “Bible Trivia!”

But back to that first question, of *all* the miracles Jesus performed, only the feeding of the 5,000 is recorded in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. That let me know it must be a very important miracle to the Lord. Remember there is a *message* in every *miracle*, so let’s read this text and see what the Lord is saying to us today. The title of the message is: “Jesus is STILL Feeding the Crowd.”

Luke 9:10-17. When the apostles returned they reported to Jesus what they had done. Then he took them with him and they withdrew by themselves to a town called Bethsaida, but the crowds learned about it and followed him. He welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed healing. Late in the afternoon the Twelve came to him and said, “Send the crowd away so they can go to the surrounding villages and countryside and find food and lodging, because we are in a remote place here.” He replied, “You give them something to eat.” They answered, “We have only five loaves of bread and two fish—unless we go and buy food for all this crowd.” (About five thousand men were there.) But he said to his disciples, “Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each.” The disciples did so, and everybody sat down. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke them. Then he gave them to the disciples to set before the people. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over.

As we think about this miracle there are four things I want us to learn about Jesus:

## 1. JESUS ATTRACTS CROWDS—BUT HE WELCOMES EACH PERSON

Mark writes that Jesus and His disciples were actually trying to get away from the crowds. Jesus just told the disciples, “Let’s get away and rest awhile.” So, they got in a boat and sailed to the northern end of Sea of Galilee to Bethsaida. The crowd followed on shore and when they arrived, there was a mob of people waiting for them. If there were five thousand men, there were probably ten to fifteen thousand people altogether. It would have been easy for Jesus to have complained and asked the crowd to go home because He needed some private time or some time with His disciples. Instead we are told He looked at the crowd and had compassion for them because they reminded Him of sheep without a shepherd. I love this about Jesus. He was a people person. Saving and helping people was His entire purpose for coming to earth. I have to admit Jesus shames me at this point. There are times after I have been talking and listening to people all day that I don’t want to be around people. There are times I don’t want to answer the phone, I don’t want to counsel another person—I just want to be left alone. But that just shows how far I am from being like Jesus. I have a little reminder in my office that says, “People don’t interrupt my ministry—they *are* my ministry.”

Here we are today, not quite 5,000, but a crowd for sure. Jesus is here and He is not so impressed with the large number of folks. Instead He is intensely interested in you and deeply concerned with your needs. He has time for you. He open His arms to you. He welcomes you right now.

As Jesus was teaching and healing, the disciples began to get nervous because they saw a huge problem developing. It was getting close to suppertime and they were in a remote area with nowhere for the mob to buy food to eat. Here was their counsel to Jesus in verse 12, “Send the crowd away, so they can go find food.” They were basically saying, “It’s not OUR problem these folks are foolish enough come out here with no food.” But, thank God, Jesus refused to send the crowd away. I’m so glad Jesus doesn’t ever refer you to someone else. Instead, He stays with you until your needs are met. Now, let’s see how He does it. Next, we learn:

## 2. JESUS ASKS US TO DO THE IMPOSSIBLE—TO TEST US

I love Jesus’ statement in verse 13. He says, “YOU give them something to eat.” Can’t you just hear the incredulity of the disciples as they complained to each other, “What? US feed them? That’s impossible.” Exactly.

In John, we are told Jesus knew exactly what He was going to do all along. He just said this to test the disciples. There were basically two big problems they faced that afternoon. One was obvious but the other was more concealed.

### **PROBLEM #1: Lack of food**

Obviously, there were hungry people and no food to feed them. By the way, the fact that Jesus is going to feed hungry people should remind us we are called to do the same thing. It’s hard to tell a person Jesus loves them when their stomachs are empty. That’s one reason why we serve free hot meals to hungry people every evening of the year at our Good Samaritan Outreach Center in North Tyler.

Experts tell us there are still hungry people on our planet. An average of 13 people die every minute from nutritional-related diseases. You blink your eye an average of 13 times a minute, so that means every time you blink your eye, a person is dying of hunger. But experts also tell us more than enough food is being produced on this planet to feed everyone, the problem is distribution. And that opens the door for corruption and crime. Sin is the main reason hungry people are dying. But there was another problem present that day, and it was a greater problem than a lack of food.

## **PROBLEM#2: Lack of faith**

The reason Jesus gave them the “impossible” command was to simply show them they didn’t have much faith. When I was in college, I had a professor who often started class by announcing, “Everyone clear off your desk except for one blank sheet of paper.” We all knew he was about to give one of his pop tests. Sometimes I was prepared and sometimes I wasn’t. Jesus does the same thing for us today. When you face the very hardest times of your lives, it’s like God is saying, “Take out a blank sheet of paper.” The only question on God’s test is: DO YOU TRUST ME? The score on God’s test is not for His information; it’s to show us how much faith we really have. Your faith will be tested continually throughout your life, not to shame you, but to strengthen you. In James 1:2-3 we read: “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know the TESTING OF YOUR FAITH develops perseverance.” Once you realize problems are God’s pop tests, it makes it easier to say, “Oh boy, another test!” God uses these tests to develop our character. When you encounter a problem—whether it’s how to feed 5,000 people or how to deal with a difficult boss—there are generally three different ways you can address your problem.

First there is a group I call the “Feelers.” They address problems with their emotions: You can recognize them because they usually use this phrase: “I feel that...” The disciples looked around and saw the mob and they felt panic because the day was getting late and there was no food. Anytime you approach a problem with feelings you are in danger of making a huge mistake. Their “feelings” said, “Send these folks away.” I have people say they made a decision because, “I just had a feeling.” That’s a pretty scary way to make decisions—why? Because your feelings can be totally wrong.

I’ve told you before when I was first taking my private pilot lessons many years ago, the flight instructor often had me close my eyes and then he would put the aircraft in unusual attitudes, like a steep climbing turn followed by a diving turn in the other direction. Then he would tell me to keep my eyes closed, take the yoke and try to return the aircraft to level flight just using my feelings. I could never do it. When I tried and said, “Okay, I think we are straight and level now,” he would have me open my eyes and we would be anything but straight and level! He taught me to trust what the instruments were telling me, not what I was feeling. Many times after that when I was flying in IMC (instrument meteorological conditions) I would have to override my feelings and look at the instruments and believe what they were telling me. That’s true in the Christian life. If you try to live by feelings, you’ll be mixed up and confused over and over again. To all the feelers, God says, “I don’t want to hurt your feelings, but you fail the test.”

The second group of folks is what I call “Figure-ers.” They address problems with their minds. You can recognize them because they often preface their remarks with: “I think that ...” These are the calculators, the analyzers. In the account of this miracle in John’s gospel, we are told Phillip made this statement about feeding the crowd: “Lord, eight months wages would not be enough to buy everyone just one single bite.” I think Phillip was the CPA of the disciples. He already analyzed the situation. Can’t you see him in the background as he whips out his handheld abacus and says, “Let’s see. Fifteen thousand people times \$1.25 a person, divided by a months wages ...” He had it all figured out, just like some of you think you have it all figured out. You see, God’s math is different than our math. Man can take five loaves and two fish and maybe divide it between six or eight people at the most; that’s our math. But Jesus didn’t *divide* the food; He *multiplied* it. Man’s math says, “Five loaves and two fish divided by 10,000 = IMPOSSIBLE. God’s math says, “Five loaves plus two fish times the power of God = 10,000 full stomachs. You see God has an awesome multiplication table. To all the figure-ers, God says, “Your calculation is correct, but you fail the test.”

You may object. “Aren’t we supposed to use our minds?” Yes, we are to think through all things, but we are not to “lean on our own understanding.” The Bible says we have to believe in our hearts, not our heads. Do you know how far apart heaven and hell are? Eighteen inches—the distance between your head and your heart. God is so big you can’t cram Him into your head, but He is so personal He will live in your heart.

The third group is what I call “Faithers.” They address problems with their faith. You can always recognize a faither a smile away because they say things like: “I believe that God ...”

There was at least *one* faither in the crowd that day. John tells us Andrew brought a little boy to Jesus who had five loaves and two fish. I like Andrew because he was always bringing people to Jesus. This little unnamed lad must have surely had faith, or else he would not have surrendered his private sack lunch to Jesus. He didn’t know what would happen; he just decided to trust Jesus with his food. That’s what faith is. You don’t know exactly what will happen, but you are still willing to trust God.

I would love to have seen the look in Jesus’ eyes as He smiled at the little boy thinking, “You passed the test.”

Glance back this main point: JESUS ASKS US TO DO THE IMPOSSIBLE—TO TEST US.

Think about some things God has told you to do that seem impossible. Some of you have not yet started to tithe your income to the Lord because you are a “feeler” or a “figurer.” You feel afraid that you couldn’t live without that precious 10%. Or you have taken a calculator and have figured you just can’t afford it. May I remind you again God’s math is different from ours? Tithing is impossible, that’s why God asks us to do it.

Some of you think it’s impossible to stay in your bad marriage. You feel you can’t make it and you have figured out it won’t work. God’s Word says, “What God has joined together, let no person tear apart.” I’ve had people tell me they don’t love their spouse anymore. I say, “That’s okay, just act like you love him.” They say, “Isn’t that faking it?” No it’s actually *faithing* it.

They say, “Don’t I have to be true to my feelings?” Why, what have your feelings ever done for you? Try being true to God; try being true to the Word of God.

I want you take this concept and apply it to every command of God, whether it’s the Ten Commandments or loving your neighbor or forgiving those who have hurt you. You may not feel like doing it and you won’t figure out why you should—but faith says, “By God, I’ll do it.”

### **3. JESUS ACCEPTS WHAT WE OFFER HIM—EVEN IF WE THINK IT’S NOT ENOUGH**

When I get to heaven, I want to meet the little guy who gave Jesus all he had. These “loaves” were not like a loaf of bread we have today. They were little biscuits made of barley, the cheapest flour. Like the old preacher said, “They were just barley bread at all.” Don’t think of a couple of catfish or bass. These would have been small little fish like sardines or anchovies, really only used to smear on the bread to give it a little meaty taste. It wasn’t much of a meal in terms of quality and quantity but it was all he had. He could have given Jesus a biscuit or two, and maybe one of his fish, but he gave it all. He could have said, “This is not enough, so I’ll just keep it.” Even poor Andrew, who brought the boy to Jesus said, “Here is a lad with five loaves and two fishes but what are they among so many?” Like most of us, he would have been better off to stop speaking before he expressed his doubt. But thank God, the little boy said, “Here, Lord. It’s not much, but you can have it.”

Most of us are like Andrew. We have a drop-in-the-bucket mentality. We see the need and we see our tiny resources and we want to say, “What’s the use?” Three years ago, I’m sure there were some people who looked at the expense of building this facility and said, “My little offering won’t mean much.” But it has been the faithful giving of people who didn’t have very much that has allowed us to construct this facility. I’ll never forget the sight of our children bringing their little treasure chests full of coins and wrinkled dollars. They didn’t have much, but they brought the little they had. They gave almost \$9,000.

You may think you don’t have much to offer the Lord but He is willing and waiting for you to give Him what you do have. Some of you haven’t joined the choir because you think your voice is not good enough to offer to the Lord. Believe me, I just spent the last ten years standing right in front of these folks, and some of ‘em can’t sing a lick but thank God they are up there singing. Together with those other voices, it’s sounds beautiful.

Some of you ought to be working in Sunday School. You think you don’t have much talent to offer the Lord. May I remind you the very best ability is availability. Offer what you have to Jesus today. Finally, we learn that

### **4. JESUS ADDS HIS POWER TO OUR POVERTY—THE RESULT IS PLENTY**

The first thing Jesus did was to organize the folks into groups of fifty. God is not a God of confusion but of order. Picture this scene: Several hundred groups of fifty sitting on the green, grassy hills. This was better than Meals on Wheels—it was Meals on Hills. Don’t overlook this little detail. Jesus wanted the people to eat together. Nobody was to eat alone. They could enjoy

food and fellowship with other folks. People often ask me how a church as large as Green Acres really cares for our members. We do it exactly the way Jesus did it. We are divided up into groups of approximately 50 people. These are called Sunday School classes. That’s where people are fed the Word of God and fellowship together. That’s how you organize ten to fifteen thousand people. There is no place in the family of God for spiritual lone rangers. Even the Lone Ranger had Tonto. So, Jesus organizes the crowd to receive the maximum benefit of His power.

Then Jesus proceeded to multiply the food. The equation is simple: Jesus’ supernatural power added to our poverty equals plenty. Let’s examine again exactly what Jesus did to multiply the food. Look again at verse 16. Every action at this point becomes important because I believe we can find five practical steps each of us can take so our “little may become plenty.” We are going to fly thorough these at light-of-the-world speed, so listen fast.

### **YOUR LITTLE CAN BECOME PLENTY WHEN YOU: (1.) Look up to heaven for your help**

When Jesus took the food, the first thing He did was to look up to heaven. When you face a need, don’t look at the problem and don’t look at your meager resources. Lift up your eyes and look to heaven. Here’s great advice from Psalm 121:1-2: “I lift up my eyes to the hills—where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.” It may be you feel overwhelmed right now with your marriage problem, your financial problem, your family problem or your physical problem because you are looking in the wrong direction? Like the song says, “Turn your eyes upon Jesus; look full in His wonderful face; and the things of earth will grow strangely dim; in the light of His glory and grace.”

### **YOUR LITTLE CAN BECOME PLENTY WHEN YOU: (2.) Thank God for the little that you already have**

The next thing Jesus did was to thank God for the food. It was only a tiny amount, but Jesus said, “Thank you, Father for this food.” We spend much of our time asking God for *more* rather than thanking Him for what we already have. Thanksgiving is the only way to approach God, we “enter His gates with thanksgiving.” Thanksgiving is the best way to approach a problem as well.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Dutch artist, Nicolaes Maes painted a picture entitled “Old Woman Praying.” It depicts a simple woman sitting alone at her table praying over half a loaf of bread and a small bowl of soup. You can tell from the surroundings she is a poor, humble woman. Her rough hands reveal the evidence of many years of hard, manual labor. Maes was inspired to paint this after visiting this woman. She invited him to join her for the meager meal. After the prayer, she looked up and with a smile said, “All this and Jesus, too!” Her comment inspired that beautiful painting.

Maybe you need to go home look around you and start thanking God for the little you already have. That’s a lot better than complaining or begging God for more.

### **YOUR LITTLE CAN BECOME PLENTY WHEN YOU: (3.) See the value of brokenness**

According the spell checker on my computer, “brokenness” is not even a word. But it is certainly an important spiritual concept. After Jesus looked to heaven and thanked God for the food, He *broke* it. It was in this act of breaking the bread that it began to multiply. God truly values broken things. David, a broken man, prayed this prayer in Psalm 51:17, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.” In our materialistic culture, a broken object becomes less valuable, but in God’s economy, brokenness only increases the value. The bread had to be broken before it could be multiplied; The alabaster box Mary brought had to be broken before the perfume could be poured out; The clay pots of Gideon and his 300 soldiers had to be broken before the light could spill out; the roof above Jesus had to be broken up before the friends could lower the paralyzed man to Jesus; and the body of Jesus had to be broken before our sins could be forgiven.

The prayer Evans Roberts prayed ignited the spark that produced the great Welsh revival in 1903. It was, “Lord, bend me, break me. Break me until I am conformed to the image of Jesus.” Someone told me a few weeks ago there was an element to my preaching they had never seen before. They observed that because of some of the problems I was dealing with, I was experiencing a new level of brokenness in my own life. They were right. This perceptive, Spirit filled person said I should thank God for whatever was producing this valuable brokenness because it was a blessing to many people. Folks, it’s hard to thank God for those things produce brokenness in us but you and I must recognize the spiritual value of brokenness.

### **YOUR LITTLE CAN BECOME PLENTY WHEN YOU: (4.) Serve others before you serve yourself.**

I can just imagine when the little boy presented his meal to Jesus, Peter probably said, “Well, at least the STAFF will be fed!” But Jesus instructed them to serve all the people *first*. I’m sure every time Peter returned for more he just knew they would be out by the time he could eat.

Here’s an important lesson. If you are most concerned about meeting your own needs first, you will suffer through a pretty miserable existence. Be willing to help other people **FIRST** and you’ll find your needs and problems don’t seem quite as severe after serving others.

When I was about fourteen, I worked at a Gulf gas station in South Alabama. Whenever a car drove up, I would go out and ask, “How can I help you?” Gas was so cheap then some folks would say, “Give me a dollar’s worth of Ethyl.” I pumped the gas, washed their windshields and checked their oil because this was long before self-service. Today, almost every gas station is self-service. That sign you see on gas pumps has actually become a sad reminder of our entire society. Most of us are more interested in self-service—serving ourselves—rather than offering full service to others. A real disciple is committed to full service to others.

### **YOUR LITTLE CAN BECOME PLENTY WHEN YOU: (5.) Look for the leftovers**

Mark tells us everyone had all they wanted to eat. It was an all-you-care-to-eat full service meal. But when everyone had eaten, Jesus wasn’t through. There were lots of leftovers to be gathered. There’s a lesson in the leftovers. Once a new, young preacher, fresh out of school was delivering his first message. He was so nervous he said, “And Jesus fed five people with 5,000 loaves and

2,000 fish.” An old man sitting on the front row caught the mistake and said with a laugh, “Ha! That’s nothing, *I* could feed 5 people with 5,000 loaves!” The next Sunday the young preacher decided to correct his mistake and get even with the man who made the sarcastic comment. The preacher said, “Last Sunday I meant to say Jesus fed 5,000 people with five loaves and two fish.” Then he turned to the sarcastic man and asked, “Could you do THAT?” The old man smiled and said, “I sure could if you let me use the leftovers from last week!”

How many disciples were there? Twelve. How many baskets left over were there? Twelve. God’s math is always perfect. The word “broken pieces” is not the best translation. Don’t picture a fish head and some crumbs. It is a word that means “portions” or “servings.” There is always exactly enough when Jesus is present. If you don’t think you have enough, it may be you have been neglecting the leftovers.

A good cook can do amazing things with leftovers. In the wintertime, Cindy can take all kinds of leftovers and make a soup that will make your eyes water it’s so good. We often consider it second-class food but God’s leftovers are special! Some of you may feel like a leftover yourself. You’ve come through a tough experience and you feel like a second-class person. God has always used leftovers, remnants. There was nothing special about five biscuits and two fish but in the hands of Jesus, it became a feast. Some would have considered the twelve baskets of leftovers scraps or garbage but they fed the disciples. In God’s hands, leftovers aren’t garbage; they are delicious.

This miracle is not really about physical food. In John 6, we hear what Jesus said *after* the feeding of the 5,000. Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw the miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for the food that endures to eternal life which the Son of Man will give you.” (John 6:26-27) Later in that chapter He said, “I am the bread of Life. He who comes to me will never be hungry.” (6:35) The folks who ate the bread and fish that day were satisfied for a short time but soon they were hungry again. In a few minutes, most of you will leave and go out to find something to eat. Before you leave, let me ask you, “Have you received the Bread of Life?” When you partake of it, you will never be spiritually hungry again.

Others of you need to come to Jesus today with the little bit you have and say, “Here Lord, it’s not much, but I place it in your hands.” Some of you feel like a leftover person, worthless and useless. Learn how much Jesus loves and uses leftovers. As I’ve said before, it’s not about us and who we are and what we have—it’s all about Jesus!

## CONCLUSION

Years ago a famous musician was scheduled to perform a concert using a priceless Stradivarius violin. The concert hall was packed and when he took the violin from the case, there were “oohs and ahs” from the audience as they saw the priceless instrument. For the next fifteen minutes, the musician thrilled the audience. He made the violin sound as beautiful as a mother singing a lullaby to her children. He could make it sound like the laughter of a child and the weeping of a woman. The people sat on the edge of their seats and drank in every heavenly note. As he finished the first section, the audience stood to its feet and applauded. To their surprise and horror the violinist took the instrument by the neck and crashed it onto the stage and then

stomped on it until it was broken and splintered. The shocked audience was silenced. The musician walked off stage and returned carrying another case. He opened it, removed the violin and said, “This is the real Stradivarius. What I was playing before was a \$50 fiddle. I just wanted you to know that it is not the instrument; it is the artist who draws the bow across the strings that makes the music. He resumed the concert, but this time the audience ignored the instrument and focused on the ability of the musician. That’s like us—we are all like the cheap fiddle—we feel like leftovers, or a tiny, insignificant meal of five biscuits and two sardines. But in the hands of the Master, our lives can become something beautiful and lasting.

## OUTLINE

### 1. JESUS ATTRACTS CROWDS—BUT HE WELCOMES EACH PERSON

### 2. JESUS ASKS US TO DO THE IMPOSSIBLE—TO TEST US

Problem #1: Lack of food

Problem #2: Lack of faith

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the TESTING OF OUR FAITH develops perseverance. *James 1:2-3*

### 3. JESUS ACCEPTS WHAT WE OFFER HIM—EVEN IF WE THINK IT'S NOT ENOUGH

### 4. JESUS ADDS HIS POWER TO OUR POVERTY—THE RESULT IS PLENTY

You little can become plenty when you:

1. Look up to heaven for your help
2. Thank God for the little that you already have
3. See the value of brokenness
4. Serve others before you serve yourself
5. Look for the leftovers

Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw the miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for the food that endures to eternal life which the Son of Man will give you.” *John 6:26-27*



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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes